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The Arabian Mission

Quarterly Letters from the Field



Number Thirty-five, July to September, 1900

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QUARTERLY LETTERS FROM THE ARABIAN MISSION

July-September, 1900.

BAHREIN.

During the past three months, all our work has been on the islands, and no tours were made, save in the neighborhood of Menamah village, which is the commercial capital of the group and the center of the pearl trade in the season. Over ten thousand people leave the islands for the fisheries and although a few merchants from other towns in the Gulf come to Menamah, the population is decidedly smaller and all interest centers in the

Books and Tracts.

pearl bazaar. In spite of these adverse circumstances, the one colporteur with us during this period sold about one hundred and fifty Scriptures and one hundred other books. Many of these were sold at the dispensary, and in one or two cases the patients were very eager to learn something of the truths of the gospel even after they were cured of their ailments. An effort was made to reach outsiders by a careful distribution of tracts and leaflets. Some of this smaller ammunition hit the mark, and we were pleased that a lordly Arab came to our house to borrow a copy of "Sweet First Fruits." He had been caught by a smaller leaflet and said that its statements were to him as startling as they were true. The army chaplain of the Turks on inhospitable Kabar wrote a long letter (in poetry) praising the Christian faith and asking for the second volume of a controversial book published in Cairo. One evening, after a lantern-talk to more than two hundred Arabs, men, women and children, a large number were eager to get a leaflet on the "Sacrifice of Isaac" as an explanation of one of the slide-views which they had seen.

*An Introduction
to Royalty.*

For the past six years, the readers of these quarterly letters have heard of the ruling Sheikh of Bahrein, 'Isa bin Ali. I am glad at this time to be able to introduce you to him and his stalwart sons, all of whom aspire to succeed their father in holding the reins of government. Personally Sheikh 'Isa and his family have ever been very friendly to us, and when in days gone by, storm-clouds threatened our work, they were raised by others—the religious teachers of Islam, those “witch-doctors” and “rain-makers” of Arabia. The vizier on the left of the picture is a canny old man and full of strange, though liberal, ideas on the future of the world's progress. He



had a dream and a vision of the Prophet Jesus last year of which he told us on one of our visits ; but I fear his heart is utterly in love with lucre. The dress of the Arabs here shown is “full dress” in all Eastern Arabia, and the great amount of gold embroidery, together with gold and silver trimmings on their swords and bowie-knives, make it very expensive.

Sheikh 'Isa became undisputed ruler of Bahrein in 1870, when all his rivals were deported to India, and he placed under British protection.

My Valedictory.

On September 11th, Doctor S. J. Thoms came to Bahrein from Busrah to take up the medical work and make it more worthy of that name than it has

hitherto been in the hands of a layman. For the past six years we have done what we could with quinine and forceps and rolls of bandage. The result may not be large in statistics or in marvelous cures, but prejudice has been disarmed and our present establishment on the island is due wholly to friends won over in time of their need. The fulcrum is fixed. Now is the time to exert a larger leverage. It is no longer a score of patients in a small room, with a few drugs and appliances, but a properly equipped hospital that we look forward to : and you at home must join us in your prayers to that end, and in active co-operation. Doctor Thoms and his work will soon speak for themselves. You can understand, however, that with all my joy in welcoming him as a fellow-worker, there was mingled just a little of regret that I can no longer dig out molars, dress ulcers and talk to fever patients while preparing them powders. I do not think any patients will have regret, and as the new arrangement will give me all my time for evangelistic work all is for the best. The total number of cases from July first to September eleventh was 807 ; nearly all of them were very poor people and with the exception of a dozen Jews and Jewesses they were Moslems.

S. M. ZWEMER.

Dispensary work was closed at Busrah September 1st. I left for Bahrein one week later, reaching there the 11th, and took charge of the dispensary the 13th.

*Dispensary
Work at
Busrah.*

The summer at Busrah has been delightfully cool, comparatively speaking. We had only a few nights in which we could not sleep, and only a few days in which the maximum temperature reached 110 degrees in the shade. We have kept fairly well throughout the hot season, and little Frances has kept fat in spite of prickly heat, sand flies, and the other pests and nuisances which are quite as trying for us as the heat.

I kept the dispensary open during the summer and during the three months of June, July and August I treated 2,650 patients and performed a number of interesting operations, besides helping the English doctor at Busrah with several of his, from which I received fees which helped along our own work. Having fortunately secured the invaluable friendship of the Governor of the province, or vilayet, all Turkish officials with whom I had dealings were exceedingly good to me.

The first day I had charge of the Bahrein dispensary I had an interesting case, the details of which will bear relating.

*Opening
Work at
Bahrein.
A Shark Bite.*

I had just finished with the dispensary patients of the morning when a pearl diver was brought in from the pearl banks with one arm very badly mangled and the other bitten entirely off just below the elbow by a shark while diving for pearls. The accident had occurred the day before and the wounds had been covered with burned dates and pitch. This had stopped the bleeding, but you can imagine the difficulties of preparing the wounds for aseptic dressings. One bone of the arm was gone entirely, and the splinted end of the other projected some distance beyond the torn flesh below the elbow. When I had finished dressing the first arm and had our noonday meal was ready, and as the instruments had not yet been unpacked and I was tired and hungry, I allowed the man to rest while we eat our meal and unpacked the instruments. Mrs. Thoms remains in Busrah until our new Bahrein house is ready for occupation, and my assistant has not yet moved down, so my assistance was limited. However the patient was prepared.

Mr. Zwemer gave the anaesthetic, and Gabriel, one of the colporteurs, attempted to assist me in the amputation, but he became sick as soon as I began to cut and left me alone. It was necessary to amputate some distance above the elbow; a Bedouin held the shoulder while I finished the operation and dressed the stump. When the man recovered consciousness he insisted upon walking some distance to a boat in which he went to his home. This is the twelfth day and he is doing finely. The patient's father and brothers did not return from the pearl-banks until several days afterward, and one morning they all came to the dispensary with the patient. The whole family showed signs of gratitude, but the father weeping covered my hands with kisses and my head with blessings.

*Now for a
Hospital.*

There are grand opportunities for the development of medical work here; surgical cases abound and the people only want confidence to give a surgeon more work than he can do. We all here agree that the time for doing medical work on a small scale is past. Now is the golden opportunity for a well equipped dispensary immediately, and finally for a hospital. A Bahrein Arab has offered to build a hospital for us on long lease, and we believe that nothing would be such a grand memorial to

our fallen comrades, Geo. Stone and Peter Zwemer, than a hospital; the *first* MISSION HOSPITAL in all Arabia. We are praying about this important matter and ask you to join us.

SHARON J. THOMS, M.D.

MUSCAT.

*All Aboard
For Muscat.* It is a little more than two months since I came to Muscat. Although from the first appointed to this station, it was deemed advisable that I take advantage of the cool weather in Bahrein. But my heart ever yearned for Muscat, chiefly I suppose because it was here that my predecessor the lamented Peter Zwemer labored. Nor have my hopes suffered disappointment. Each of our stations has its peculiar attractions, but I am happy to call Muscat "my home."

*Tour through
Oman.* I must confine myself in this letter to a description of a tour which Mr. Cantine and I made in the interior of Oman. I have space to allude to only a few of the interesting sights which the province of Oman affords.

*Beautiful
Scenery.* The ride from the very outset was interesting, but most interesting at the beginning because of the beautiful scenery which the country affords. First of all on leaving the gates of Mutrah the not distant hills studded with forts and watch-towers loom up against the horizon jealously keeping guard over the city. Following the path for a mile or more the scene changes. The hills widen so that a level plain greets the eye, made the more picturesque by the numerous caravans and heavily laden darkies coming and going over well-beaten tracks the result of ages of travel. Further on the scene again changes, for the hills stand apart, and between them we see the Gulf, along the shore of which we journey on long after the sun has set, till finally all the beauties of nature having lost their charms, after a few hour's ride on a troublesome donkey, we are happy to spread our blankets on the sands of Ghobra and gaze at the beautiful clear sky. How brightly the stars shine in the Arabian sky. No wonder David sang so sweetly of the stars. I can now better understand why God directed Abraham's attention to the stars when the memorable covenant was made. Nothing interferes with their brightness.

*The Oriental
Sky.*

The Arabs' Time-piece.

Speaking of the stars I may here mention how the Arabs regulate their movements by means of them. On our return we lodged along the roadside at Sieb. We intended to resume the journey early in the morning. Said the camel driver: "Do you see that star?" pointing to Jupiter, as it shone some twenty degrees above the horizon. "When that star is out of sight we start again," he said. So we slept, and on awakening I looked for Jupiter, but it had disappeared. But who knows how long since it had set?

Date Gardens.

Beautiful date gardens dot the province of Oman. Indeed, dates are the chief product. The gardens are all watered by means of irrigation-canals, the water coming either from wells or from springs, the water from the springs being in some cases delightfully cool while in others unbearably hot. Some of these irrigation canals extend for miles and miles. In the Wadies, too, there is water, but chiefly underground, as may be seen here and there through openings in the rocks greatly resembling wells. The drivers know all the watering places along the way and happy we were because of this, as one grows quite thirsty traveling in a hot sun.

Mark 6: 39.

Never before did I understand why Mark should specify grass as being green till I saw it illustrated in Semayel. The ordinary grass of Arabia, what little there is of it, is of a yellowish-green color. Real *green* grass is scarce, but we saw it there as it grew in the shade of a huge tree and watered by an everflowing spring.

Buildings.

The buildings of Oman are of two kinds. Those of the poorer classes are made of date sticks, very small and very dirty as they are shared by men and animals alike. Those of the other kind are made of mud bricks and are generally large structures. The forts and watch-towers are made of the same material. The rich show not their wealth by their houses, as this would excite the cupidity of the Sheikh. The buildings are all loop-holed, thus revealing the restlessness of the Arab spirit, as their houses—I cannot call them *homes*—may at any time be turned into forts. Every house of which I have seen the interior and every siba—reception room—is lined with pegs fastened into the walls on which the Arab hangs his gun. Mosques, too, are very numerous; one place called Nagal alone boasting of 360. In some of the mosques on the way we were allowed to spend the night; but in others serious difficulties would have

arisen from any profanation of such sacred ground by the foot of an "unbeliever." Forts and watch-towers deck the land as do the public schools our own land. This is what may be expected. Jesus Christ came to give the world peace, but Mohammed unsheathed his sword to drink in blood so long as he can and dare.

*Hospitality and
Democratic
Customs.*

The Arabs are a proverbially hospitable people. Having letters of introduction from the Imam of Muscat and Oman, we were treated right royally wherever we went. On reaching a village we were led by the Sheikh into a sibla where coffee, preceded by dates, was soon handed around. In the meantime, if we were to stay any length of time, servants were sent to prepare our lodging, while others prepared a meal brought in on a huge tray—a meal which would suffice a score of hungry men. As soon as the meal was over, the Sheikh would come to our lodging place, together with the chief men of the village, followed by the omnipresent little children loaded down with ear and nose rings and bracelets and anklets, as well as numerous charms, which strangely contrasted with their dirty faces and clothes. The usual questions asked are in regard to political matters, such as the relative strength of the nations, the wars now going on, etc., though it is an easy matter to introduce religious subjects, to which they readily respond. Every Arab, and even little boys, are furnished with a ghaujar, a small circular knife suspended at the waist by means of a belt. It is a strange thing not to see an Arab shoulder a gun.

*Islam losing its
hold.*

A pleasing sight, though a sight difficult to be reconciled with the teaching of the Koran, is the unveiled women. This shows that Islam has not the hold on these people it has elsewhere. Another strange fact is that it is not an uncommon thing in these parts to hear of Arabs drinking intoxicating liquors. True, the orthodox regard such as heretics, but they profess to be Mohammedans still. In these respects, this town has filled our hearts with encouragement. Mohammedanism has not the hold on the Arabs of Oman it has elsewhere, though naturally there are exceptions, there being found those who as rigidly observe the requirements of the Koran and of the traditions as elsewhere. Oman is undoubtedly a most hopeful field. This is seen from the number of Scriptures sold. They readily buy the gospels and other portions, and even little children who can scarcely read are foremost in their eagerness to

possess a copy. This is most hopeful. The false creed has worked itself deeply into the hearts of the older ones, but the rising generation is open to impressions unknown to their fathers.

An Argument. The Arabs are generally quite ready to engage in an argument. This was especially evident at Mispha, where, in his eagerness to prove his point, an Arab actually brought a Koran on the scene. The point maintained was that all prophets, because they are prophets, are sinless. As Mohammed is a prophet he, too, is held to be without sin. In the course of the argument he held that the name Mohammed is mentioned in the Bible, referring to John 14:16, where the "Comforter," by an ingenious change of the word in the Greek is said to refer to Mohammed. When told he was mistaken, he brought the Koran, reading in it a passage relative to this. But the colporteur still maintained that Mohammed's name is nowhere to be found in the Bible. "Then your Bible has been changed," he said. "It must be in the original because the Koran says so, and as the Koran came direct from heaven its contents cannot be disputed," he continued. He then went into a rhapsody over Mohammed and the Koran, saying he is the glorious and the last prophet, that his name is written on the gates of Paradise, etc. From this it may be seen that Moslems will never be brought into the kingdom of God by means of argument. Their belief in the Koran is so strong that nothing can shake it. Theirs is a blind faith. What the Koran teaches must be true because the Koran says so. O, that such implicit faith rested on the Rock Christ Jesus.

War among the Arabs. In many respects we were agreeably surprised and satisfied, especially the fact that over two hundred portions of the living Word were left in their hands. But we could not accomplish what we set out to do. Our tour included Gebel Akhdor, our plan being to follow the Wady Semayel, which leads to this mountain. Along the way we heard rumors of a war among the tribes living on the mountain—rumors prodigiously big at first, but gradually assuming a more natural and hopeful size. However, on reaching Semayel the Sheikh advised us not to make the attempt. There is another path leading to this mountain, this being the Wady Muawel. So Mr. Cantine decided to try this pass. As I was troubled with a sore foot, the result of two boils, it was deemed inadvisable that I make the attempt, since the mountain must be climbed on foot, which is no easy matter, for according to Lieut. Wellsted, Gebel

Akhdor is 6,000 feet high. Consequently we parted after we reached Nagal. However, Mr. Cantine was once more disappointed. Reaching a village called Ukan he found further travel unadvisable. True, it could have been done, but it would be well-nigh impossible to return. Hence, Mr. Cantine also returned, reaching Muscat two days later than I did. God willing, the visit to Gebel Akhdor and the region beyond is still in store for me.

H. J. WIERSUM.

BUSRAH.

The principal event of the quarter at this station is the closing of the medical work through the transfer of Dr. Thoms to Bahrein. While the change has long been anticipated, the break in this important branch of our work here is felt to be none the less unfortunate. There is consolation in the thought that our loss will be others' gain, and I trust that the Lord will greatly bless the Doctor's work at Bahrein and make it a means of influencing many lives for Christ. The closing of the dispensary is felt to be serious because medical work is so peculiarly well suited to conditions here. No doubt medical missions have their place in every field. But here in Busrah medical work is the only work possible, outside of the Bible-work, for reaching and influencing the people. Inquiries were made this Spring relative to the possibilities of educational work, but it was soon found that it would be impossible to open a school of any kind. In order to secure the necessary permit the petitioners for the right to open a school must show that there are a certain number of children of their own religious community without any school facilities. As there is no Protestant community in Busrah there can therefore be no Protestant school. Even if this kind of work were possible we could not afford to be without a dispensary, for it has proved itself the meeting ground between ourselves and a large class of the population which otherwise we could not reach. The ground will now lie fallow for a year, and it is hoped that when work is again resumed it will be with possibilities of greater service, and that it will be even more blessed than in the past.

Summer Work.

The three months of this quarter are our trying ones, when zeal and energy evaporate all too easily in missionaries and assistants alike. The

*Closing Medical
Work at Busrah
a Great Loss.*

results of lessened effort are apparent in the smaller returns of book-sales which will probably be a third less than those of the last quarter. The main cause of these smaller sales is the fact that touring was not kept up during July and August, the worst season. At the beginning of the present month, however, two of the colporteurs were sent out together and they have yet to be heard from. They are making the tour to Nasariyeh, and from there across the Mesopotamian plains to Kut-el-Amara on the Tigris. At that place they are to take an open boat and come down the river visiting the villages till they arrive at Amara. This will be the first time these places have been visited by a colporteur, and I await with interest the results of the tour, especially as some of the tribes along this route are among the most degraded in Arabia. While the dispensary was open one of the colporteurs was detailed to read and speak to the patients while they were waiting for their turn to be treated. This helped to reduce the total of Scripture sales, but there was compensation for this in the direct impressions by this personal witnessing under very favorable circumstances. The Bible-woman, Hannah, has been engaged again, and she also spent some time speaking to the women-patients in the dispensary. She is now giving her whole time to house-to-house visitation in which work she is having the same experiences of willing listeners and of opposition at times, of which I wrote before.

The out-station of Nasariyeh has not been occupied for several months of late. Results were not satisfactory and book-sales were getting smaller each month, so that the expense of keeping a man there was hardly warranted. The Bible-shop has however been kept and it has served usefully the purpose of a halting place for recuperation on the long tour above referred to. It is hoped that one of our number can go there to stay long enough to study conditions and, if possible, restore the work to its originally promising condition.

Personal Experiences. Within the last months I have had several sad experiences of how hard it is for these people to appreciate spiritual objects in that several inquirers who came asking for instruction turned back and were seen no more when they found that "loaves and fishes" were not included in our offer of the gospel. Perhaps the desire for inducements other than spiritual is not a fault peculiar to the Oriental, still with him this is quite a different matter from what we are

accustomed to, for the inducements must be the furnishing of a better support than he had, and the desire is a demand. Why we should try to make converts and not undertake to support them cannot be understood by these people. The idea of making a gain by religious profession, so repugnant to us, is natural to Islam. Its early successes were due largely to the promises of worldly gains made by its founder to his followers, and to-day, if a renegade Christian turns Moslem, he is treated most generously. It is needless to say that each inquirer that turns out this way is a disappointment to us; still there is one hopeful aspect in which to view these cases, viz., that they show the general unrest and dissatisfaction of not a few with their religion.

It was long our wish that we might have a room in this house, as we did in the former one, set apart as a chapel where we could hold our services. This wish was realized several months ago when a large unused room was re-plastered, making a comfortable airy room well suited for our purposes. English services were kept up all Summer until a few weeks ago when the date season began, while the Arabic services have been continued without interruption.

FRED. J. BARNY.

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Arabia

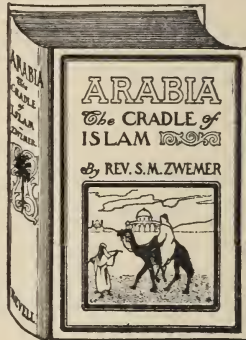
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